

Montana VR Council Meeting Minutes April 12-13, 2007

Vocational Rehabilitation Council
April 12-13, 2007
Wilderness Room, Colonial Building
Helena, MT

Members present: David Boyd, Dan Burke, Denise Corrao, Faith Dawson, Dalayna Faught, Maureen Kenneally, Sharla LaFountain, Ron Mills, Wayne Nankivel, Ruth Straley, Dick Trerise, Claudette Vance, Michelle Williamson, Mavis Young Bear

Members absent: Jackie Colombe, Andrea Falcon, Don Jones, Carol Lambert, Christina Mattlin, Dennis Moore, Paul Pearson

Staff and guests present: Peggy Williams, Joe Mathews, Bob Jahner, Barb Varnum, Beverly Berg, Brigitte Winfield, Scott Williamson, Lynn Winslow, Roger Holt, Jerry Hutch, Chuck Leggate, Matt Bugni

Thursday, April 12

Dick called the meeting to order at 10:00, and we quickly reviewed the Council's mission and values. Dick mentioned the upcoming VR Strategic Plan meeting and asked for volunteers from the Council to attend. By the end of the meeting, the following people had volunteered: Ruth, Wayne, Dick, David, Denise.

Peggy handed out a summary of transportation programs and a listing of the disability bills before the Legislature.

The Council approved the minutes from the January meeting.

During the public comment period, Lynn Winslow stated that he had concerns on the agency's procedures for deciding if MVR would pay for a consumer's masters degree.

State and National Update

Joe Mathews mentioned that our state budget was being heard on the Senate floor. The overall state budget started out as HB 2, then budgets were split into 8 bills and Department of Public Health and Human Services budget became HB 808, then some of those bills were combined and the VR budget was included in HB 820. The Legislature is scheduled to go home on April 27. The Governor's proposed budget has two new areas of funding for VR: the Montana Youth Leadership Forum and a transition counselor.

Joe, Peggy and Dick will be going to the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation on April 21. Part of that meeting will be an all day meeting for state

rehabilitation councils. Dick and Joe will go to Capitol Hill and visit Montana's Congressional delegation on one of those days (Peggy will attend a different meeting). In the area of reauthorization, nothing is new. Congress has put the Workforce Investment Act on the back burner. There is a possibility that the VR section might be pulled out and reauthorized.

The President's proposed budget level funds the VR program---usually there is some kind of a cost of living adjustment. The President's budget also eliminates the Projects with Industry, Migrant, and Supported Employment programs, and includes the funding in the regular Section 110 grant. The downside to this arrangement is that the three programs are 100% federally funded, and if this passes, they will need a state match.

VR will have a federal review next year. The federal government is working on a new methodology, and it may include interviews with Council members.

We had our public hearing in March, and many people commented on the Medicaid Buy In, Social Security initiatives, and being able to keep your health insurance when returning to work. VR is working closely with the Medicaid Buy In oversight group.

Denise mentioned she had gone through the strategic plan and lined out places where Montana is involved in areas that the federal Futures group has identified as needed. Denise's notes are included as Appendix D.

Financial Overview

Matt Bugni, Disability Services Division Financial Bureau Chief, talked about the budget for Disability Services Division (DSD). DSD is composed of 5 programs: Developmental Disabilities, Montana Developmental Center, Vocational Rehabilitation, Montana Telecommunications Access Program, and Disability Determination Services. The total budget for the division is over \$130 million per year, and VR's part of that is about \$14 million. The major funding source of Vocational Rehabilitation is Section 110 (called that because it is from Section 110 of the Rehabilitation Act). Section 110 is mostly federal funds with approximately a 20% state match required. Section 110 is a "capped" grant---that is Montana only gets a certain amount, even if more is needed to serve everyone. Montana VR spends the entire federal grant, and the new functions added by the Legislature (VR transition counselor) must be funded with all general fund because there is no more Section 110 funding.

Public Relations Activities

Chuck Leggate, Billings regional administrator, has led the effort to get public relations materials out to the field offices. He purchased tablecloths and banners for each office, and he developed PowerPoint slide shows and posters that can be shown on a display table or at a talk. He also has ordered name tags so that staff look professional at PR events. Maureen suggested that we put the PowerPoint "What's in your Wallet" on a public service announcement.

Update from PLUK (Parents Let's Unite for Kids)

Roger Holt, co-director of PLUK, gave the Council an overview of PLUK. PLUK serves anyone, not just parents and children. Last year they received over 10,000 calls. Family support consultants in eight offices statewide work directly with families. The TRIC/PLUK library, located in Billings, has over 10,000 disability related items and is searchable on line. It recently affiliated with the State Library. PLUK also has a technology lab, and they work closely with MonTech. They also offer some remote training. The PLUK website is found at www.pluk.org

Blind and Low Vision Update

Beverly Berg passed out case studies and talked about three parts of the Blind and Low Vision (BLV) program: (1) Older Blind, (2) technology, and (3) Business Enterprise Program. In the area of Older Blind, BLV serves people over the age of 55 who have a significant visual impairment. About 550 people are served each year. In the past there have been more requests for service than there were funds available, so the program limited services to people with more significant visual impairments. This year, however, there is more money to go around. The Council suggested that the BLV program find a way to spend the money because it is sometimes dangerous not to spend all of a grant. Ideas were to purchase electronic magnifiers (currently not funded), loan equipment, or pay for MAB summer school.

In the area of technology, Chuck Granger has been hired to work on BLV technology and adaptive computer issues. JAWS screen reading software can be put on a thumb drive so you can use it on any computer. He is also working on making the new VR case management system, CASE-E, accessible to people who are blind. He has worked with several blind individuals and their employers for accessibility with technology.

The Business Enterprise Program now has three vending routes and is looking at a vending stand in Helena and reopening the Missoula stand. The program is having some financial difficulties, and next year the contract expires. VR/BLV has agreed to pay \$80,000 per year for the management of the program until the contract expires. Then BLV will decide whether to continue the contract or bring the program into state government. The Council asked to hear more about the finances of the Business Enterprise Program at the next Council meeting.

Low Vision Montana

Jerry Hutch told the Council about Low Vision Montana, which provides a clearinghouse of information for people who have vision problems. This group has a database of information and sources for people newly diagnosed with visual impairments. The program is run by volunteers, and they have a toll free message number. Someone will get back to the person calling within two days. The phone number is 1-800-601-5004. The program also has a peer support network to let people know what to expect and

what services are here in Montana. The group is working on a mobile low vision unit—a van or trailer to go around the state, meet with people with vision problems, let them try out some aids, and talk with them one on one. They will not be selling equipment, just demonstrating it. Low Vision Montana will not replace the Montana Association for the Blind or BLV, but it will supplement their services.

VR Website

Peggy showed the MVR website: <http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/dsd>

This is the website for the entire Disability Services Division, and it has sections for the VR program and a general disability resource center.

VR Reports

Peggy reviewed the reports that Montana Vocational Rehabilitation submits to the federal government. In the Section 110 (work) program---the major focus of VR---the VR program also submits a computer file with about 100 pieces of information per client for all the cases that were closed during the year. That information was not included. Also, the VR state plan talks about the goals and priorities for both the previous year and the current year, and that information was not included. The reports did include VR services and costs, caseload information, financial information, client appeals, older blind, vending facilities and independent living.

VR Strategic Plan

Peggy went over the progress made on the VR strategic plan. Under the direction of Chuck Leggate who spoke earlier in the day, MVR has taken large strides in the area of public relations. Each office now has a tabletop display for setting up at events. Chuck also developed some PowerPoint programs. Another area in the strategic plan that is almost complete is the CASE-E program which is used by counselors to manage their cases. The strategic plan also points out several transition activities that have been undertaken.

Friday, April 13, 2007

Committee Reports

Committee reports are included in Appendices A, B, and C.

Public Hearing

Barb Varnum stated that 64 people plus VR staff attended the public hearing. VR also received 12 written comments. Barb is compiling the comments and will send out a survey with a VR response.

Native American Update

Barb visited the Crow reservation and participated in the federal benefits workshop. She also met with Tribal staff and talked about the federal request for proposals for

new Section 121 projects. Next week Barb will visit Lame Deer for their federal benefits workshop.

Consumer Satisfaction Survey

Barb stated that the latest survey results show that 86% of the respondents are mostly or very satisfied with VR staff. Barb went over the survey results and will send them out to Council members after names are removed from the comments. Dick suggested that the Council should look at trends, not just individual responses. We could see what has changed in the past three years. Barb will come up with a one page summary of the survey.

Comprehensive System of Personal Development (CSPD)

Brigitte Winfield related concerns with CSPD, and the Montana definition of "qualified" VR counselor. Currently VR considers a counselor "qualified" if they are eligible to sit for the CRC exam. This eligibility assumes that they have a masters degree in rehabilitation counseling. A few years ago, the CRC organization allowed people who had a degree in a related field and who had taken certain courses to be eligible to sit for the CRC exam. The problem arises when VR hires someone with a masters degree in a related field—say, psychology or social work. This new hire must then get an entirely different masters degree (in rehabilitation counseling) in order to be "qualified". VR would like to change Montana's definition of "qualified" counselor to allow people with masters degrees to take just a few specific classes so that they fit under the former requirements of the CRC organization. The Council agreed with this logic.

VR Policy on Paying for Masters Degrees

Dan Burke brought up VR's procedure for paying for masters degrees. VR does pay for some masters degrees, and Dan thinks that this procedure should be broadened. Bob Jahner explained the decision tree in this issue. He and Dan will get together before the next VR Council meeting to see if they can work out the differences. Maureen asked how many masters degrees and how many bachelors degrees we pay for and how much they cost. We will discuss this more in the next meeting.

Field Services Update

Bob talked about a number of issues in the Field Services Bureau.

1. Two of the three vacancies in Great Falls have been filled. VR still has a vacancy in Great Falls for a guidance case manager/program officer with sign language skills.
2. Bob is finishing up the rules that he discussed in previous meetings.
3. VR has two due process cases. One person was denied a training program because it was not compatible with his medical condition. The other person has not focused in on the exact problem that he is appealing.
4. Bob showed some of the CASE-E---case management system--- computer screens.

Agenda Items for Next Meeting

- VR policy on paying for masters degrees
- Business Enterprise Program financial update (more understandable format than RSA-15)
- Strategic plan
- Legislative report
- CANAR—Mavis
- SRC training and CSAVR meeting
- Transition—Ellen Swaney

The meeting was adjourned.

Appendix A

Transition Committee April 2007

Plans for 2007

- Ask Peggy Williams to invite Ellen Swaney to participate in a panel discussion before the full Council. Other panel participants would be OPI and VR. Topics for discussion would include, but not be limited to: standardization of eligibility requirements for disability support services within Higher Education; OPI's Performance Summary; update on Reauthorization of the Act (if available); and overview of the interagency agreement Joe Mathews has negotiated with Higher Education. ***Peggy attempted to contact Ellen Swaney to seek her participation on this panel. Ellen was unable to schedule. Peggy will continue to attempt to schedule with Ellen. The full VRC indicates that this would still be of interest to them.***
- We continue to support MYLF and encourage one VR Counselor from each Region to attend (also, Blind and Low Vision Services staff as needed). ***Brigitte and June are meeting on 4/19/07 to plan this year's participation by VR counselors at MYLF.***
- Reconnect and strengthen the existing connections with PLUK. Ask Peggy Williams to approach PLUK regarding representation on the Council. Ask PLUK to provide an overview of their services to the full Council. ***Roger Holt will be providing the council with the names of several possible candidates to act as PLUK representatives on the council.***
- Create an array of methods, through professional development of VR Counselors, to help them more effectively relate VR services to the IEP process (again, Reauthorization of the Act will likely affect any training). Consider joint training with partners such as PLUK, OPI, Higher Education, WROCC (Mary Morrison), etc... ***WROCC is now PepNetWest (spelling?). Brigitte attended the Council for Exceptional Children Conference in Missoula on the 4th, 5th, and 6th of April. She was an exhibitor, providing attendees with information about VR services. It is recommended that MVR be an exhibitor at this conference annually. MVR has and will continue to provide training to counselors related to the services available through partnering entities. We have had in-service training provided by PLUK, OPI, and Mary Morrison, but recognize the need for ongoing collaboration.***
- Build and maintain a "Hot Page" of disability related links. Faith Dawson will do some preliminary work on this. Marvalee Christofferson in the VR Central Office will be approached regarding the feasibility of VR hosting such a page. ***Faith has done some preliminary work on identification of disability related websites that may become a link on a "Hot Page". The group spent time clarifying our role in such a project and determined that we would focus on a page of links to disability sites that are well established and have internal controls for maintenance, such as VR, PLUK, OPI, etc.. Faith will continue to research sites and get back to the group. Brigitte will get an update from June Hermanson of MYLF who is currently building a "Transitions" website.***
- Discuss the feasibility of developing a "mentor" or "peer" list of persons with disabilities performing in specific occupations. We recognize the value. Are there liability issues?

If we proceed with this, it may be a project for VR's Futures group. *The group spent a fair amount of time discussing the possible liability related to facilitating the "mentoring" or "peer counseling" of individuals with disabilities. Once we clarified what we really thought would be of benefit to disabled consumers, we chose the term "informational interviews" as a more accurate representation of what we had in mind. We spoke of the Jobs Accommodation Network (JAN) which might be one source for disabled consumers to acquire information regarding specific occupations being pursued by individuals with similar disabilities. Brigitte agreed to review the JAN site to determine if this source of information has a component of what we are looking for. We have agreed to provide a statement of recommendations around this topic to MVR, following our next meeting.*

Appendix B

Native American Committee

April 2007

The Native American Committee met at breakfast, and discussed the meeting at the Blackfeet Reservation this summer. David will contact Sharyl, and if they would prefer to not host the meeting, then David thinks that Fort Peck would host it.

Appendix C

Public Awareness Committee

April 2007

The Public Awareness Committee watched Denise's video of when she presented to the Miles City high school last fall. She is willing to make other presentations.

The Public Awareness Committee also reviewed the report that Joe, Dick and Peggy will take to Montana's congressional delegation later this month. The report summarizes the VR program, and the committee had ideas how to improve it.

Appendix D

Notes from Denise

Secure employment quickly and effectively

- P 8 New IEP forms
- P 9 Create relationships with business employers
 - Identify barriers to hiring
 - Incentives to hire
- P 10 Hire more people for state jobs
- P 11 Network with Chamber of Commerce
- P 12 Create professional development of VR counselors relating to IEP process; higher education; PLUK; OPI; and WROCC
- P 13 Create database of employed people with disabilities and encourage job shadowing
- P 32 Develop a call sheet for referral and collaboration
- MVR state plan Increase staff by 2
- Limits to “getting jobs quickly. People with disabilities may have complex medical and employment issues.
- Order of selection would decrease employment placement; quicker cases would be lost.

How should VR improve successful outcome?

- P 37 Counselor survey to identify preferred methods

Improve diversity?

- P7 Cultural sensitivity training
- P 7 121 Tribal projects

Should VR develop customized services?

- (Public view) People with mental disabilities need “special” employment circumstances
 - Stigma prevents hiring (all)
 - EMI good example
 - Become short term workers
 - Job creation
- (Counselor view) Some people with disabilities get “stuck” in low entry level jobs and cannot earn adequate living.

Improve and expand partnerships?

- P 11 Recognize businesses with awards/educate
- P 12 Interagency agreement between VR and Office of Public Instruction and DPHHS
- P 22 Tax incentives
- P 24 PowerPoint presentation

- P 25 Employer related information shared with counselors at meetings
- P 27 video conferencing
- P 28 Consider a computer resource center and library
- P 30 Develop a guide for staff, Council and SILC
- P 35 CASE-E
- (News article) Governors economic development vision "strengthen and diversify" manufacturing sector
- Research and develop
- Resource sector
- Technology sector
- Work directly with these areas of government creating new jobs.

CSAVR Leadership

P 9 Incentives for hiring

Meet with personnel

Identify barriers

Implement solutions

P 22 Mike is doing research on tax credits

P 10 Medicaid Buy In

P 13 Educate schools about VR

P 10 Develop transportation networks

P 28 National Governors Association Grant and full time transition position

P 30 Develop ideas for transportation funding

Note: Page numbers relate to October meeting minute pages (strategic plan section)